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ABSTRACT

This press release documents the remarks made by Lauro F. Cavazos (U.S. Secretary of Education) at a press conference publicizing the 1989 edition of the "State Education Performance Chart." This chart provides comparative data for the years 1982 and 1988. It is reported that in 1988, the performance of U.S. students was stagnant. Increases in spending for education were not matched by improved performance. Scores on college entrance exams are still substantially lower than they were in the 1960s. The 1988 figures indicate that only 71 percent of current ninth graders will complete high school with their class. Educators are urged to increase graduation rates, start intervention programs early, emphasize parent responsibility, ensure attendance, and increase student academic achievement. (SI)

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE SECRETARY

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LAURO F. CAVAZOS
U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY AT PRESS CONFERENCE ON 1989 STATE EDUCATION PERFORMANCE CHART

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Horace Mann Learning Center
Washington, D.C.

May 3, 1989

EA 021 124

I am here today to present to you the Department of Education's sixth annual State Education Performance Chart.

I regret to have to report that this year our students' performance has been stagnant. The good news is that the schools are not worse; the bad news is that we also are not making progress. We are standing still, and the problem is that it's been this way for three years in a row. And, frankly, this situation scares me, and I hope it scares you, too.

Although this nation will invest more than $199 billion in elementary and secondary education this school year, increases in spending for our children's education are not matched by improved performance. For example, we are already spending more money per student than our major foreign competitors, Japan and Germany. And yet our students consistently fall behind the competition in comparative testing. Looking at virtually every qualitative measure -- college entrance exams, graduation rates, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and international assessments -- we see our students performing minimally, lacking the advanced skills needed to

succeed. This deplorable fact further underscores my belief that money alone is not the answer to our education deficit. Since 1982, we've seen per pupil spending rise from $3,165 to $3,977, a 26 percent increase. And that is in real terms, adjusted for inflation. So what I want to do this morning is share with you the Chart's general findings and then discuss with you the goals we must set and the actions I believe we must all take -- right now -- to get this country moving ahead in educational achievement.

Scores on college entrance exams are still substantially lower than they were in the 1960's. The 1988 SAT scores are down two points, to 904, while in 1972 they were 937. The ACT scores are up by only one-tenth of one point, to 18.8, while in 1972 they were 19.1. And over the 1982-88 period, our national gains have been small -- 11 points on the SAT and four-tenths of a point on the ACT.

In another critical area, graduation rates, this year's figures indicate that only 71 percent of current ninth graders will complete high school with their class. Although certain States have improved their graduation rates significantly since 1982, the national average has improved by less than 2 percentage points. As with test scores, our gains are minimal.

But the educational picture is not totally one of gloom and doom. This year's testing results do include some encouraging news. Greater numbers of students are taking the college entrance exams and the SAT's Achievement Tests. And rises in minority test scores continue to shrink the distance between their scores and those of non-minority students, slowly but steadily.

Although blacks are lifting their test scores and closing the "graduation gap" -- and recent Census Bureau figures indicate that Hispanics are also starting to narrow these gaps -- the doors to opportunity still remain shut for too many youths. It is up to us to throw open those doors.

As a nation our educational performance is merely average. While the tide of mediocrity observed in A Nation at Risk in 1983 may no longer be rising, neither is it receding. We have never, as a nation, been satisfied with being only mediocre; there is no reason for us to begin now. The President and I have called repeatedly for greater accountability in education -- not just accountability for the dollars spent, but also for educational outcome, for results.

We must do better or perish as the nation we know today. I issue a call to every American -- everyone with a stake in our

country's future -- to join President Bush and me in making a commitment to educate our people, truly educate them, once again. The challenge goes to parents, teachers, administrators, public officials at all levels and students. We must reverse the stagnation and demand an excellent education for all our children. We must stir up the education waters in America.

First of all, I urge the States, school districts, and, yes, individual schools and parents to increase graduation rates to a level equal to or even greater than that attained by Minnesota, the State that currently leads the nation with a graduation rate of 90 percent. Students need to know that we demand that they graduate and that we, in turn, will provide each and every one of them with a quality education. We will do better; we cannot afford to let any youngster face a lifetime of low-paying and low-status jobs. It is not acceptable to lose the 600,000 to 700,000 students who drop out each year. Today -- an average school day -- some 3,600 youngsters across this nation will drop out of school. This is a national tragedy.

Intervention must start early. Instead of progressing, too many youngsters fall further and further behind as they go through school. And so I offer the following challenge:

° We must cut in half the number of children who have not been promoted a grade level. It's no wonder that one-fourth of our high schoolers drop out when one-fourth of our sixth graders have already failed once in their brief academic careers. We must prevent this, not just remedy it after it occurs.

° We must clearly define what every student must know and be able to do before leaving the elementary, junior high, and high school levels. Not only must students graduate, they must graduate with the advanced skills needed to succeed when competing against the best of other countries.

° Our children must attend classes. Many districts are falling woefully short of tracking student attendance or truancy. Having as many as a third of a classroom's desks unoccupied is unacceptable. Parents and schools must work together to ensure that every child is in school ready to learn.

° Parents must be responsible for ensuring that their children complete their homework assignments, just as it is up to teachers to ensure that homework is meaningful

and helpful to children in building on their classroom learning.

- Schools must make the best use of the time our children now spend in the classroom; teachers should be freed from paperwork in order to teach.

A recent survey of 13-year-old math and science students found that Americans scored well below average, even though two-thirds of them said they were "good at mathematics." In contrast, only 23 percent of the number-one-ranked Korean students said they were happy with their achievement. We cannot be satisfied with mediocrity, and so it's time to turn things around:

- We must increase by half the number of children who perform at proficient levels in reading, mathematics, and science. We must also increase by half the number of students scoring at the highest levels.

- We must raise our ranking among nations in general science from eighth to first. Moreover, as the recent report, To Secure Our Future, asserts, our high school students must overtake Japan by mastering more mathematical skills than today's U.S. college graduates.

- We must provide those not heading for college with apprenticeship skills at least as good as those held by students in West Germany. Vocational education students must receive a quality, well-rounded education, and also benefit from meaningful, high-quality programs that provide solid opportunities and advancement in today's job market.

Today I am also calling upon all States and school districts to establish their own "Education Improvement Targets." Governors, Chief State School Officers, local school boards, district superintendents, educators, parents, and other concerned individuals can begin right now to work together to identify and announce specific goals for improving each school district and State to select the benchmarks for measuring progress toward their goals, and to discuss incentives for student, teacher, and school improvement.

At the Federal level we intend to assist in this development. The goals I've just discussed are mirrored in the initiatives that President Bush has laid out in his "Education Excellence Act of 1989" which calls for seven innovative initiatives to reward schools, teachers, and students for success: Merit Schools, Magnet Schools, alternative certification, awards to teachers for excellence, drug free schools urban emergency

grants, a National Science Scholars Program, and additional endowment funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities. By focusing on performance, these initiatives will establish incentives for success and reward quality performance by students and teachers. They hold solid promise of strengthening our educational system and encouraging many of the state-level reforms that are making a difference today. By encouraging educational choice and flexibility, and by rewarding excellence and success, the President's program offers us the prospect that in future years, the State Education Performance Chart will indeed show substantial progress.

At the same time, at the Federal level we will be doing four things. First, we will help bring these issues to national attention. Second, we will continue to highlight exemplary programs and share their results. Third, we will seek ways to reward successful schools, teachers, and students. And fourth, we will find ways to release the States from unnecessary statutory and regulatory burdens in exchange for higher performance.

Let us set our standards high and stick with them. I further call on States and school districts to issue annual reports on

their progress and the efforts they are making to reach these targets.

As David Kearns and Dennis Doyle have written in their excellent book, Winning the Brain Race, "the two most important lessons the corporate world can offer educators are accountability and measurement." We have come together today, as we have five times before, to focus on measurement. We do so because we are concerned about the future of American education. We all want to see improvements. But it will be hard for us to argue that our schools and students have improved unless our communities can agree on what our students should know and be able to do, unless our school systems can provide objective indicators of student performance and progress, and unless we hold ourselves accountable for results. That is why I issue this call to action, and set forth these goals -- so that we can have not just a general desire for change but a concrete set of goals to strive for.

What some have done, all can do. In every instance these standards have been met or exceeded by some sectors, districts, or States. We must focus not on the minimum, but on the best -- because in the end, only the best is good enough for all our children. And so let us commit ourselves to the work, the hard work, that is needed to reach our goals. To this end I will be

writing to every governor, every Chief State School Officer, and each local school board president in the country to enlist their support. Let us join together to improve education for the future of our children and our nation.